



## LABORATORY QUALITY ASSURANCE

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Every U.S. citizen expects access to the highest quality medical care, including laboratory testing. Changes in the healthcare environment make it difficult to determine whether laboratory services are safe, effective, timely, and adequately patient-centered.
- Public health officials have expressed concerns over qualified personnel shortages, adequate laboratory training, use of new technology, fiscal constraints, changes in clinical practice, and additional voluntary or regulatory laboratory standards.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC provides leadership in addressing these quality issues in laboratory testing by convening Institutes on Critical Issues, such as the Quality Institute Conference, which focuses on ways to improve the quality of laboratory services and patient safety. CDC's laboratory practice research agenda is Evaluation of Quality in Laboratory Practice and Standards (EQLPS), which provides information on the distribution of laboratory tests by type and location. This is the first comprehensive body of information about the number and types of tests conducted in the nation's 184,500 clinical laboratories.

The Model Performance Evaluation Program provides ongoing information about the testing practices and performance of laboratories that test for HIV-1 infection and for tuberculosis. Additionally, CDC has taken a leadership role in assessing activities related to genetics testing. Through national information gathering efforts about genetics testing, CDC is developing science-based and policy approaches to assist public health and clinical professionals in assuring high-quality testing and in understanding the benefits of testing for genetic disorders.

#### *Examples of Program in Action*

- EQLPS conducted a survey of hospital coagulation laboratory practices, identifying several instances where best practice guidelines were not being used.
- The Quality Institute Conference brought together many stakeholders in the healthcare system to discuss ways to improve the quality of laboratory services and enhance patient safety.
- CDC, through a grant with Dartmouth Medical School, developed an interactive CD-ROM tutorial emphasizing the genetic testing process and instructing on the use of genetics in clinical practice. The product was sent to all U.S. medical schools and is being distributed through the American College of Medical Genetics.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will work with the laboratory community to create a laboratory quality measurement and reporting system, which will focus on information needed by specific audiences including policymakers, professionals, and the public. The Institute for Quality in Laboratory Medicine, a public/private partnership, is being developed to provide a framework for improving the quality of the nation's laboratory services.

*For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/program](http://www.cdc.gov/program)*

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